

Text: Cohen Discusses Army Report on No Gun Ri Incident

11 January 2001

(Cohen stresses remembering Koreans, U.S. soldiers) (1010)

U.S. Secretary of Defense William Cohen discussed a report released by the Department of the Army January 11 on the deaths of Korean civilians in the vicinity of No Gun Ri, South Korea in July 1950.

"The passage of 50 years has reduced the possibility that all of the facts can be known about the tragic incident that took place in the vicinity of No Gun Ri in South Korea. We have determined, however, that U.S. soldiers killed or injured an unconfirmed number of Korean refugees in the last week of July 1950 during a withdrawal under pressure in the vicinity of No Gun Ri," he said.

Cohen stressed that "while recollection of these events is painful, neither Americans nor Koreans should bury the history."

"Innocent Korean civilians died as a result of the war forced upon our two countries, and we should never forget them, as we should never forget the brave soldiers who fought to defend freedom. At the same time, we must keep in mind that our war effort protected, and eventually preserved, the liberty of the people of the Republic of Korea, laying the foundations for our now longstanding partnership and for the prosperity and democracy that the Republic of Korea enjoys today," he said.

Following is the text of Cohen's statement:

(begin text)

United States Department of Defense
News Release

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SECRETARY OF DEFENSE STATEMENT ON NO GUN RI

Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen today released the following statement:

"In September 1999, after press reports that Korean refugees were killed by U.S. soldiers in the vicinity of No Gun Ri during the Korean War, President Clinton directed an investigation be undertaken by the Department of Defense to determine what occurred at No Gun Ri in 1950. Over the last 15 months, the Department of the Army has conducted a thorough and exhaustive review of the No Gun Ri incident, working closely with the government of the Republic of Korea, interviewing over 150 U.S. citizens and examining over one million documents. My oversight of this exhaustive investigation was aided by eight distinguished Americans -- Ambassador Donald Gregg, retired Col. Young Oak Kim, Dr. Ernest May, former Congressman Pete McCloskey, Mr. Don Oberdorfer, former Gov. Mike O'Callaghan, retired Gen. Bob Riscassi, and retired Gen. Mick Trainor -- whom I asked to participate as well. Today, we are releasing the findings of the Army's investigation.

"The Korean War was fought for a just cause. After North Korea invaded South Korea on June 25, 1950, U.S. forces were rushed into battle from Japan, joined later by many thousands of Americans, 36,000 of whom lost their lives in battles to defend freedom. In the early weeks of the war, U.S. troops were young, under-trained, and unprepared for the battle tactics of the North Korean forces. The sacrifices of the U.S. and South Korean soldiers who lost their lives in this fight for freedom on the Korean Peninsula can never be forgotten.

"The passage of 50 years has reduced the possibility that all of the facts can be known about the tragic incident that took place in the vicinity of No Gun Ri in South Korea. We have determined, however, that U.S. soldiers killed or injured an unconfirmed number of Korean refugees in the last

week of July 1950 during a withdrawal under pressure in the vicinity of No Gun Ri.

"Earlier today, the White House released a statement by President Clinton that expresses the United States' deepest sorrow, regret, and sympathy to the survivors and the victims' families for the events that transpired at No Gun Ri, and for their anguish during their long effort to gain acknowledgment of that tragedy.

"While recollection of these events is painful, neither Americans nor Koreans should bury the history. Innocent Korean civilians died as a result of the war forced upon our two countries, and we should never forget them, as we should never forget the brave soldiers who fought to defend freedom. At the same time, we must keep in mind that our war effort protected, and eventually preserved, the liberty of the people of the Republic of Korea, laying the foundations for our now longstanding partnership and for the prosperity and democracy that the Republic of Korea enjoys today.

"As a symbol of our deep regret over the tragedy, the United States will erect a memorial in the vicinity of No Gun Ri, which will be dedicated to the innocent Korean civilians who lost their lives during the struggle to preserve the independence of their country.

"In addition, the United States will establish a scholarship fund, which the U.S. and the Republic of Korea have agreed to name the United States - Republic of Korea Commemorative Scholarship. This fund will preserve the memory of those who died during the war. It will also be used to offer South Korean youths the chance to further their education in the Republic of Korea and in the United States to strengthen the ties between our two countries.

"The Republic of Korea and the United States lost many lives during the Korean War. Through these and many other sacrifices, the independence of the Republic of Korea was preserved and flourishes today. As we reflect with sorrow over the tragic loss of innocent life in this war, we should not lose sight of the profound achievement of freedom and democracy, nor can we forget the strong and enduring relationship that has grown between the Republic of Korea and the United States. Our shared sacrifice of half a century ago has forged ties of mutual respect and cooperation that we should all be proud of as the United States and the Republic of Korea begin a new century of friendship."

(end text)